SUPER METROID

GENRE(S): Action-adventure

AVAILABLE ON: SNES

DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo, Intelligent Systems

PUBLISHED BY: Nintendo

RELEASED: March 19, 1994

Fun fact: *Metroid* co-creator and producer Gunpei Yokoi didn't want this game made. First of all, he believed that while a 16-bit game in the STYLE of *Metroid* could be exciting, there was nothing that could be done better in the case of this particular franchise. He was finally coaxed into producing the game, but he still set his own terms: the staff working on this game was to be absolutely minimal. As one of Nintendo's corporate leaders, he didn't want to waste good resources on a game that probably wouldn't succeed. After all, as critically successful as the previous games in the series were, they never reached the commercial heights of Nintendo's dynamic duo of Mario and Zelda. The initial reviews and sales of *Super Metroid* back home in Japan were not that astonishing, quite like Yokoi predicted – but in the West, it spread like wildfire. In just a few years of time, and for many years to come, *Super Metroid* was suddenly hailed as one of the greatest games ever made. ...And guess what? 30 years after its release, it's as good, if not even better than it's ever been. *Super Metroid* is a timeless masterpiece, one of the best and most influential action-adventure games of all time, and the *Metroid* franchise's golden standard.

Samus Aran delivers the last surviving Metroid larva from SR388 to a scientific colony owned by the Galactic Federation, whose findings regarding the creature's complex DNA are astounding: while a deadly parasite by nature, its powers can be harnessed into a miracle cure. Pleased that her mission is finally done, Samus bids farewell to her "child" and sets out to find a new bounty. Just hours later, her ship's computer intercepts a distress call; the colony is under attack. Samus investigates the scene to find the Metroid has been stolen, and by none other than her old enemies, the recently regrouped Space Pirates. Samus returns to Zebes to eliminate them once and for all.

The older I get, the more I love the story of this game – to begin with. There's absolutely no dialogue or even text in the game after the opening; *Super Metroid* is widely acclaimed – again, to begin with – for its timeless ability to tell a magnificent story without words. During the most recent trip through Zebes I found myself actually reflecting on the choices Samus has. Is the mere possibility of an omnipotent miracle cure worth the risk, when the source of that cure is the deadliest creature in the galaxy, fully capable of rapid genocide, and there is always someone looking to take advantage? If it comes down to it, are you able to pull the trigger when coming face to face with your former companion and only friend in the galaxy? You never thought about stuff like this while raking through *Metroid* and *Metroid II*; you went in, shot some nasty buggers, a few bigger nasty buggers, and then, along came this one cuddly bugger, from sworn enemy to your adopted child, who eventually turned your whole view on *Metroid* upside down.

The game is like a combination of the best qualities in both games that came before, injected with a huge dose of all things new and awesome. Let's start with the game's layout. Since it takes place on Zebes, your initial reaction before actually seeing the new design might be: "it's just the original game on 16-bit steroids". Well, that's not entirely untrue, but very far from the full truth. The level designs and background textures are deliberately similar to the original game. Also, some specific rooms from the original *Metroid* are in this game, just as they were – an early example arrives in the form of Mother Brain's original reactor, which is now a pile of dust, broken glass and metal; the new and evolved Mother Brain governs the Space Pirates from deep down in the planet's core, tightly guarded by the four lieutenants. Four?

Ridley and Kraid are joined by Draygon, who's best described as a strange cross between a turtle, dragon and scorpion, and Phantoon, who is, like his name implies, an extremely unattractive creature with a ghost-like presence. In addition, there are a few minibosses, one of whom (Crocomire) is actually considered one of the whole franchise's most memorable enemies – you had never seen anything like the

battle against him in a Nintendo game back in early 1994. (There were quite a few things which you hadn't seen before *Super Metroid* came along.) Unlike in the original game, the bosses are absolutely gigantic, and Ridley is specifically designed to stand out as an extremely dangerous motherfucker, in contrast to his role as a ridiculous pushover in the original *Metroid*. This is where he rose to prominence as the franchise's most stalwart villain, specifically by his (re-)introduction in the game's prologue.

This time, Zebes is divided into five areas as opposed to the original's three, and there's also an additional level to be found within the starting area. Crateria is that starting area, and added to the game because in the original, you spent all your time in the planet's interior areas – you never saw the surface, which is just as dark and foreboding as the rest of the planet. Much later on in the game, you'll be able to access a Federation starship lying wrecked in Crateria – this is the additional level I mentioned, and let it be known that it's one of my favourite levels in the whole series. Then we have Brinstar, Norfair and Tourian – the themes of Brinstar and Norfair are similar, but much more clear cut than in the original. Brinstar is basically a jungle, while Norfair represents Nintendo's vision of hell. As in the Biblical one. Tourian is a high-tech, high-security laboratory housing Mother Brain like in the original, it's just relocated to the planet's core. Finally, there's a whole new, large, and extremely confusing area named Maridia, which is divided between two contrasts, an overgrown water tank and a desert wasteland.

How is the core gameplay different than before? Well, let's get THE most singled out important update out of the way first: we've got a MAP! Old-school explorers of the open world of *Metroid* might think they never needed one, but they're lying to themselves, and will discover the truth eventually. The map is a quintessential part of the game, and its proper completion. Points of interest – all sorts of terminals, switches, upgrades and item tanks – are marked on the map with a white dot. They're sometimes quite well hidden, so it's up to the player to actually find them. Also, while the map draws itself as you explore, and you are able to draw out the whole map of the current area at special terminals, there are dozens of hidden, uncharted rooms which will add to the map only after you've found them yourself. The map isn't perfect; the placement of doors is not indicated in any way, and the POI's stay on the map even after

discovery, but for all intents and purposes, what we have is 100% better than nothing. Also, Samus' new equipment includes an X-Ray Scope, which allows you to see MOST hidden items and passages; just trying your luck in every corner, nook and cranny is no longer necessary.

As for Samus' other stuff, there's plenty of new toys... but first, most importantly, we have to acknowledge the introduction of the tech screen. The first two games had a mutual problem: the Ice Beam, a piece of shit weapon that was quickly replaced with a much better one, BUT you needed to reacquire the Ice Beam in both games to be able to finish the game, since it was the only basic beam that worked on Metroids. In this game, you don't actually replace anything. You can use the tech screen to combine different beams into a stronger version, the best example being the Ice Beam. You can combine it with the Spazer to create a three-shot ice-based weapon, or both the Wave and Plasma Beam, to create an extra-powerful laser shot that freezes just about anything in one shot, and can shoot through walls. You can completely turn off anything in your possession – if you feel the Screw Attack makes things too easy, well, just turn it off.

By far, the most iconic and from here on out, standard tool in your repertoire is the Speed Booster, which allows Samus to run at an extremely high speed and velocity once she gains enough momentum. She runs so fast and hard, that she can literally break through certain walls just by running into them. Speed Booster also introduces the Shinespark; by ducking in the middle of a high-speed run, Samus is able to store the momentum and use it to dash through the air, either straight up or to any side, until she hits an unbreakable obstacle. It's a very cool ability, to be sure, but I damn well know I'm not the only hater of the few puzzles related to the use of Speed Booster – they're not so bad as far as this game is concerned, but they really went over with the ones in *Metroid Dread* years later. Here's where that started, if you want to place the blame somewhere.

Another iconic, and soon-to-be standard tool is the grapple beam, which functions as a (very weak) weapon, as well as a "rope" to hang from specific blocks, much in the style of *Super Castlevania IV*. The Super Missiles are just what they sound like – about five times stronger than the regular ones. Power

Bombs are like a bunch of portable nuclear devices, capable of clearing whole screens of enemies and breakable objects with one click. Last, but definitely not least, we have the well-hidden four Reserve Tanks, to increase your energy reserve to 18, beyond the 14 regular Energy Tanks.

Last, I will speak to you about the game's absolutely phenomenal audiovisual design. When I started writing, I was not sure how long I'd babble on about it, so I saved it last – so this has nothing to do with its importance. It IS important in making *Super Metroid* so great, after about a thousand followers have tried to improve on its winning formula, and failed despite some really good efforts. I remember when I read my first review of the game back in 1994, and it was said that the game didn't quite meet the graphical standards of the SNES. That's actually partly true, but all and any superficial flaws are paid more than in full by impeccable character, boss and level design, the sheer size and diversity of the game world, and magnificent effects.

The soundtrack deserves its own paragraph. Future *Metroid* stalwart Kenji Yamamoto made his franchise debut here, alongside Minako Hamano, and together they produced a diverse set of tunes that serve as the foundation to nothing less than one of the greatest video game soundtracks of all time. The most confusing fact about the soundtrack is, that no matter how much of it has been remixed over the years to CD quality, nothing has ever come close (speaking entirities here) to the very original. Every area in Zebes has its own standout theme – the best being Brinstar's theme (sweet bass line, bro), and the absolutely epic, apocalyptic, choir-driven theme of the lowest parts of Norfair. The best of them all is heard in the very beginning, and the very end of the game: that's called "Theme of *Super Metroid*", and you'll have to hear it to believe it. That tune works in any form, and apparently the developers liked it too, 'cause it went to appear in a few future games despite its exclusive title.

I've said pretty much all there is to say about *Super Metroid*, really. The thing is, it doesn't really matter what and how much of it I say, 'cause it's simply an experience everyone should live through. It's a sci-fi masterpiece from which many sci-fi-, as well as horror games have taken delightful cues from, and I think

those games that haven't, are those that first lost the race. It should also be mentioned that coupled with 1997's *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, which rebirthed Konami's *Castlevania* as inspired by this particular game, *Super Metroid* is credited with the creation of the ”Metroidvania” concept, an extremely popular action-adventure subgenre in both AAA- and especially the modern indie game circuit. As I said about those many followers before, there's never been a game quite like *Super Metroid*. As a personal sidenote, I'd like to mention this was my older brother's favourite video game of all time, and he taught me to play it back in the jurassic times. I'd like to dedicate this review to his memory (1969-2020).

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